



United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

South Fork Negrito Campground Relocation Final Environmental Assessment

Reserve Ranger District, Gila National Forest, Catron County, New Mexico
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Gwynn Tank

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Introduction

The Reserve Ranger District is proposing to relocate the developed camping infrastructure from two closed campgrounds, that were impacted by the 2012 Whitewater Baldy post fire impacts, to two new campground locations. Forest Service recognized the need to relocate these campgrounds to remain in compliance with Executive Order 11988. These actions are proposed to be implemented on the Reserve Ranger District of the Gila National Forest.

We prepared this environmental assessment (EA) to determine whether implementation of the two campground relocations may significantly affect the quality of the human environment and thereby require the preparation of an environmental impact statement. By preparing this EA, we are fulfilling agency policy and direction to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). For more details of the proposed action, see the Proposed Action and Alternatives section of this document.

Proposed Project Location

The project areas are located approximately 30 miles southeast of Reserve, NM on NFSR 141 (Figure 1). The South Fork campground is located in Township 9S, Range 17W section 15 and Gwynn Tank campground lies in Township 9S, Range 16W, section 7.

Need for the Proposal

This proposal is needed because Executive order 11988 directs the forest service to “avoid to the extent possible the long and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of flood plains and to avoid direct and indirect support of floodplain development wherever there is a practicable alternative.” The entire project area falls within the 2012 Whitewater-Baldy Fire scar. Four storms in four days over this fire scar induced a historic flooding event in 2013. Shortly after, the Forest Service recognized the elevated risk of camping within the South Fork Negro and Gilita riparian corridors and the Reserve Ranger District was compelled to remove developed camping opportunities at both Gilita and South Fork Campgrounds due to public safety concerns. Historically, South Fork Negro Campground provided seven individual camping units while Gilita Campground provided 8 individual units. Many recreationalists utilize the area and demand for developed recreation opportunities on the district persists. The purpose of this proposal is to replace these developed camping opportunities lost due to flooding and Executive Order 11988.

Public Involvement and Tribal Consultation

This project was posted on the Gila National Forest’s Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in October 2017 and has been periodically updated. The District Ranger has discussed the proposed action with local government, grazing permittees and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) were involved in consultation and provided clearance for the proposed action.

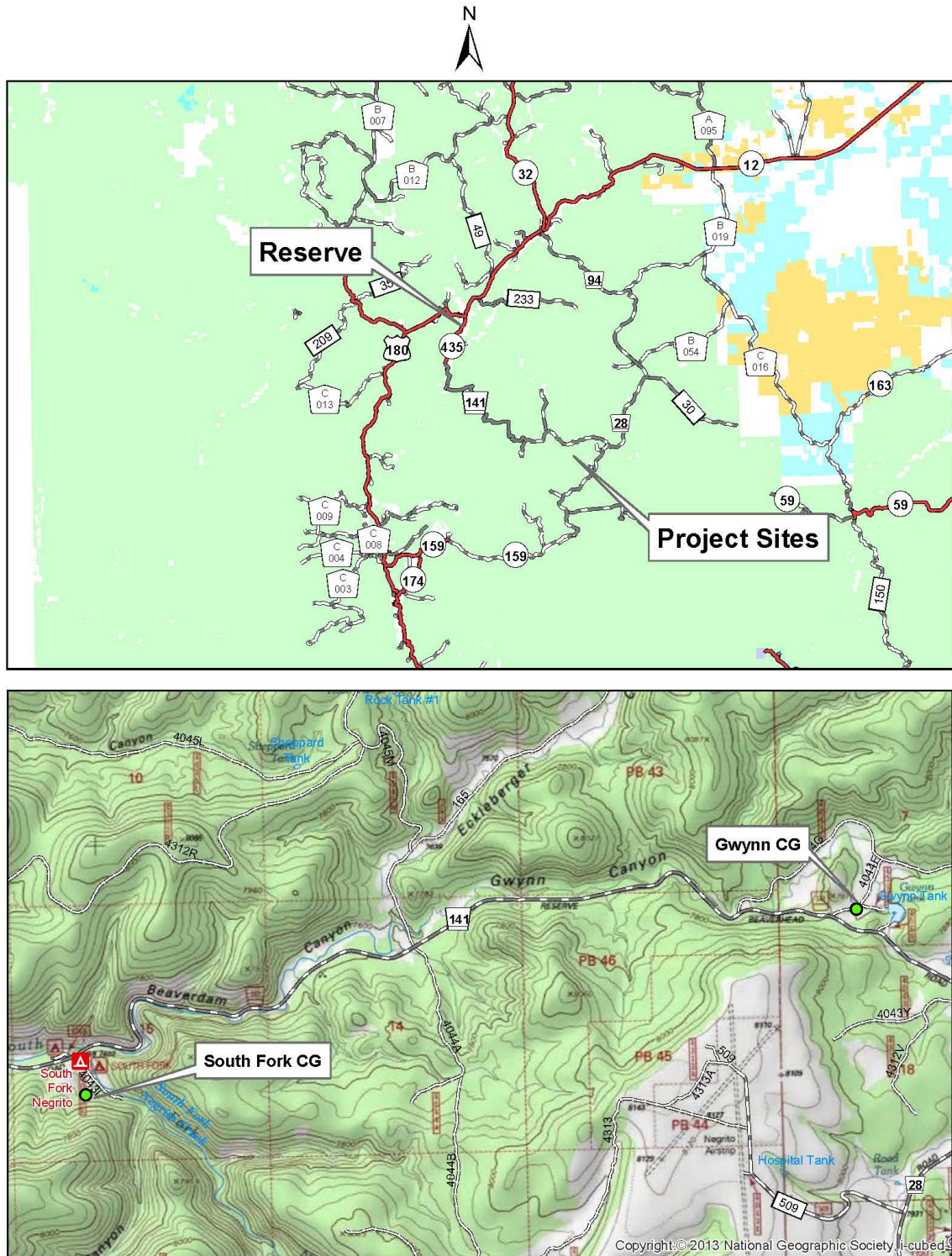


Figure 1. Vicinity map

Proposed Action and Alternatives

The proposed action and following alternatives were considered:

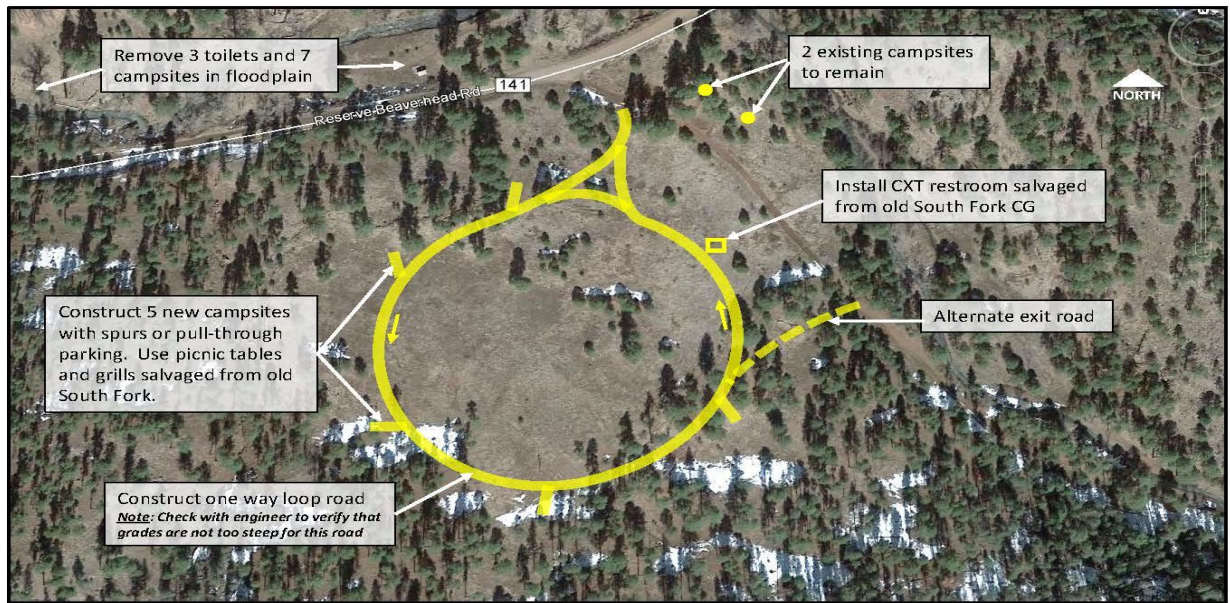
Proposed Action

The Forest Service proposes to relocate the developed camping infrastructure (toilets, picnic tables, and fire rings) from the closed Gilita and South Fork Negrito Campgrounds to two new campground locations. This relocation may leave the closed campgrounds in a decommissioned state. The first campground would be located directly across Forest Road 141 from the closed South Fork Negrito Campground to an area above the floodplain. This new campground location would be named “South Fork Campground”. The new South Fork Campground would accommodate approximately 35 users with a range of 5-7 developed campsites and one CXT Precast Concrete toilet (figure 2). A second campground would be located approximately 2 miles east in the area of Gwynn Tank. The “Gwynn Tank Campground” would also accommodate approximately 35 users with a range of 6-8 campsites and one CXT toilet (figure 2). Both campgrounds would require improvement to the existing road system as well as new construction to create a passenger vehicle rated, single direction loop that accesses individual campsites. Fencing may also be installed around either or both new campgrounds to help delineate the site boundaries. Timing of major construction for the campgrounds would be coordinated with the district biologist and other specialists to accommodate seasonal concerns. Some small diameter trees may be removed to provide the best road alignment. However, large diameter trees will be retained and the road system designed to avoid them.

No Action Alternative

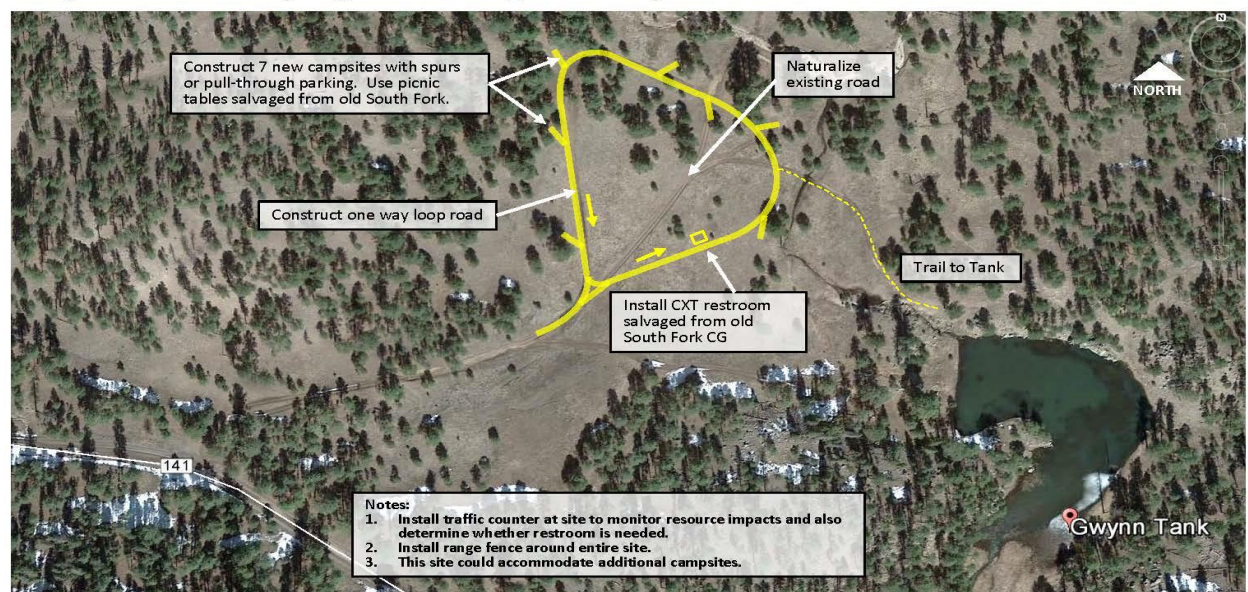
Only the two closed campgrounds will exist and the District’s ability to provide developed camping opportunities for 75 campers would be lost. Historically this opportunity was provided by South Fork Negrito and Gilita Campgrounds, both of which have recently been closed due to safety concerns. The districts recreation operation and maintenance costs would be reduced through this alternative, however, the district would be less capable of providing developed recreation opportunities. Both the Gwynn Tank and South Fork sites would likely remain popular dispersed recreation areas. Both would require personnel time and costs associated with operation and maintenance of the area, although costs would be less than those associated with a developed campground.

New South Fork Campground Design Concept



DAK 7/12/17

Gwynn Tank Camping Area Design Concept



DAK 7/12/17

Figure 2. Conceptual designs for South Fork and Gwynn Tank campgrounds.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

This section summarizes the potential impacts for the resources of concern. Other resource analyses may be found in the project record.

Wildlife

Threatened and Endangered Species (T&E)

No Action

Under the No Action, impacts to wildlife by human presence and construction activities would not occur.

Proposed Action

A project-specific biological assessment/evaluation was prepared to evaluate the potential impacts to special status species. The following summary of impacts to threatened and endangered species is based on findings in the biological assessment/evaluation. All T & E species present in Catron County, NM were considered and it has been determined that management actions within the South Fork and Gwynn Tank Campground installation will have the potential to effect the Mexican Gray Wolf, Mexican Spotted Owl and its Critical Habitat, and the Narrow-headed Gartersnake and its proposed designated habitat. It does not contain suitable or critical habitat for any other T & E species.

Mexican Gray Wolf

There are wolves surrounding the project area. If a wolf pack or pair of wolves begin denning within or near the proposed campground areas, active mitigation will help minimize and direct effect to Mexican gray wolves from the proposed action. The Forest Service will continue to work with the Wolf Team to avoid disturbing dens; however, the installation of the campgrounds will occur outside of the denning period for the wolves.

Installation activities, such as machinery installing picnic tables and road maintenance within the campgrounds, may indirectly affect Mexican gray wolves. This indirect effect would be to the wolves' native prey base, native ungulates. The native ungulates will be dispersed away from the campgrounds and to the surrounding areas while installation occurs and when the campgrounds are active with campers. This disturbance could indirectly affect Mexican gray wolves for certain periods of time (installation, high camping periods and maintenance). However, some of the disturbance timeframes are for a short duration – in the instance of installing the structures or road maintenance. During the high camping periods, which normally occur during holiday weekend and hunting season (August-November) – wolf packs and individual wolves are highly mobile and would avoid campgrounds that would have a higher concentration of people. These high camping periods would mostly be out of the sensitive time frame for denning wolves.

The project area does contain suitable habitat for wolves reintroduced under the ESA 10(j) rule. The reintroduced Mexican gray wolf population on the Gila National Forest has been designated as a non-essential experimental population, pursuant to section 10(j) of the ESA. By definition, a nonessential experimental population is not essential to the continued existence of the species. Therefore, no proposed action impacting a 10(j) population so designated could significantly

affect the recovery of the species. However, to minimize potential conflicts, the Reserve Ranger District will continue to work with the Mexican gray wolf Team. It was determined by the Reserve District biologist that management actions associated with the project are **“Not Likely to Jeopardize the Continued Existence of the Wolf”**.

Mexican Spotted Owl

Mexican Spotted Owl Protected Activity Centers (PAC) surround both the proposed South Fork and Gwynn Tank Campground areas. The direct effects to the Mexican Spotted Owl (MSO) would be noise disturbance from recreational users. Noise is expected to be more concentrated in the proposed upgraded campground area when recreational users are present, but only for shorter periods of time – 1 to 3 days. The campground receives visitors sporadically throughout the summer, but most use is during hunting season (August-November). The noise disturbance from campers is not expected to be more than it was within the closed campground across the road. The proposed campground will focus the noise in on concentrated area versus spread out over approximately a mile; Most of the busier, noisier times for the campground would be when the Mexican Spotted Owl is out of the breeding season.

Indirect effects to the Mexican Spotted Owl would be that in establishing a designated campground, there would be a concentration of noise from campers that could disrupt or disperse the native prey base for the MSO. The prey base would be affected if there were larger groups of people, and usually on a shorter time (2-5 days). The prey base will use the closed camping area and avoid the smaller footprint of the proposed South Fork Campground when the campground is active. Past MSO surveys have not shown any MSO activity in the proposed area however, surveys will be completed prior to implementation of the project. If MSO are detected then project activities will be done outside of breeding season. The Reserve District Biologist concluded that that the level of effect from the implementation of the proposed action, cumulative effect and the associated interrelated and interdependent actions a likely insignificant and discountable; therefore, a determination of **“May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect”** was made for the Mexican Spotted Owl.

Direct effect to the designated critical habitat is that the upgrade to the campgrounds would take out much of the open grassland/meadow habitat within two PAC's. While no trees larger than 9" dbh would be removed, some of the open grassland would become camping areas or support the road that loops through the campgrounds. Effects will be minimal due to the surrounding forest structure. The habitat within and adjacent to these PAC's contains open grassland and numerous meadows. None of the Primary Constituent Elements (PCE) associated with forest structure or maintenance of prey for MSO will be changed by project activities. The Reserve District Biologist determined that the proposed action **“May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect”** MSO critical habitat.

Narrow-headed Gartersnake (NHGS)

The proposed South Fork Campground location is across NFSR 141 and adjacent to South Fork Negrito Creek which is proposed NHGS critical habitat. There is the possibility that a snake could be harmed directly by installation of the picnic tables and toilets, however the chance of this occurring is very slim. The proposed campsite is within NHGS proposed critical habitat. This area will be surveyed for NHGS prior to implementation and management activities will be adjusted accordingly.

Indirect effects to NHGS from upgrading the campground would be sediment deposits into the South Fork Negrito Creek. This is expected to be minimal as there is an established road present

that parallels the creek and the vegetation that would be between the campground and the creek would remain in place and not disturbed. Natural rock features would be left in place and the proposed road installation would go around those features. The potential for modification of vegetation along stream banks, through excess human recreational activities. Human recreational activities may remove basking sites and cover for the snake from potential predators. The presence and activities of the recreational users could affect the use of the area and they could modify the area by moving rocks and branches for the NHGS that could be there.

There are no direct or indirect effects to the NHGS or proposed critical habitat with the proposed Gwynn Tank Campground due to the species not present in that area.

It was determined that the proposed action “**May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect**” the Narrow Headed Gartersnake and “**May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Modify**” NHGS proposed critical habitat.

Regional Forester Sensitive Species

No Action

Under the No Action, impacts to wildlife by human presence and construction activities would not occur.

Proposed Action

A project-specific biological assessment/evaluation was prepared to evaluate the potential impacts to special status species. The following is a summary of impacts to sensitive species based on findings in the biological assessment/evaluation. All Region 3 sensitive species were considered and it has been determined that management actions within the South Fork and Gwynn Tank Campground installation will have the potential to effect the following sensitive species (table 1) based on presence of species and/or suitable habitat.

Table 1. Regional Forester Sensitive Animal, Insect and Plant Species within or near South Fork and Gwynn Tank Campgrounds. Y = Yes, N = No, U = Unknown

Common Name	Species Present	Habitat Present	Site Specific Discussion & Determination of Proposed Action
Apache Northern Goshawk	Y	Y	Ponderosa Pine-Oak, and mixed conifer occurs on around the proposed campground areas. The proposed action does not include any type of forest manipulation (other than some trees less than 9”dbh) by mechanical or fire. Prey habitat will be maintained. It is reasonable to expect that the proposed action will provide and maintain satisfactory vegetation, watershed (riparian), and soil condition – as it is a much smaller area than the original South Fork Negrito Campground, which bordered the South Fork Negrito Creek. Indirectly there may be human disturbance during busy camping periods. The implementation of this project under the proposed action may impact individuals, but will not cause a trend toward federal listing or affect the viability of this species.
Common Ground Dove	N	Y	In New Mexico, Common Ground-Doves primarily occupy lowland riparian areas. They occur most frequently in the lower Gila Valley (from Cliff south) and in Hidalgo County, especially in

Common Name	Species Present	Habitat Present	Site Specific Discussion & Determination of Proposed Action
			Guadalupe Canyon. They also occur rarely in the Rio Grande Valley from Socorro south (where they may have once been more common) and in Eddy County (Parmeter et al. 2002). Riparian habitat does exist on South Fork Negrito Creek, though it is 1650 feet higher than the 5,413 feet elevation, which is considered above the species elevation distribution NM PIF 2012). There would be No Impact to this species from the proposed action.
Gray Vireo	Y	Y	The breeding habitat of the gray vireo is generally open woodlands/shrublands. Junipers (<i>Juniperus</i> spp.) are the dominant element in most areas of occurrences in New Mexico. This species is an insectivore and occurs in New Mexico only during the warmer months (April-September). It is a rare summer resident in the Gila National Forest (Zimmerman, 1995 quoted in BISON-M,) and is apparently secure in New Mexico (Nature Serve, 2011). The Proposed action may impact individuals but will not contribute to a trend towards federal listing or loss of viability for the species.
Arizona Bell's Vireo	N	Y	Habitat does occur next to the proposed campground areas. In New Mexico this species characteristically occurs in dense shrubland or woodland along stream courses, with willows, mesquite, and seepwillows being characteristic plant species (BISON). There would be No Impact to this species from the proposed action.
Desert Sucker	N	N	Riparian habitat does occur next to the proposed South Fork Campground. This Fish species does occur in the adjacent South Fork Negrito Creek. There would be No Impact to this species from the proposed action.
Spotted Bat	Y	Y	Spotted bats are a native mammal of undocumented or possible occurrence in the Negrito watershed adjacent to where campgrounds are located. Spotted bats have been captured in ponderosa pine forests, piñon-juniper woodlands, and open semi-desert woodlands. Rocky cliffs are necessary to provide suitable cracks and crevices for roosting as is access to water. Factors limiting spotted bat populations are unknown but the species may be adversely affected by heavy livestock grazing in riparian areas. There would be No Impact to this species from the proposed action.
Allen's Lappet Browed Bat	Y	Y	Allen's lappet-browed bats are a native mammal of undocumented or possible occurrence in the Negrito watershed. The lappet-browed bat seems to be largely a dweller in forested zones from the yellow pine zone down to the riparian forest of sycamores, cottonwoods, and walnuts. There is perennial water in the South Fork Negrito Creek with riparian woody vegetation.

Common Name	Species Present	Habitat Present	Site Specific Discussion & Determination of Proposed Action
			There would be No Impact to this species from the proposed action.
Arizona Montane Vole	N	Y	Requires wet herbaceous growth (e.g. wet meadows, marshes) above 6800 feet above sea level (BISON 2012) which does occur near the South Fork Campground. There would be No Impact to this species from the proposed action.
Goodding's Onion	N	Y	Occurs within mixed conifer and spruce-fir zones, generally in north-trending drainages at elevations ranging from 2,286 to 3429 m (7,500 to 11,250 ft) (USFWS 1997). This type of habitat does occur next to the proposed campground areas. The proposed action may impact individuals or habitat but will not contribute to a trend towards federal listing or affect the long term viability of the species.
Mogollon Death Camas	U	Y	Mogollon death camas is found in organic soils in the understory of upper montane and subalpine coniferous forest, often with aspen at 8,700-10,500 feet. A very narrow endemic, it is known only from the Mogollon Mountains in the area of White Water Baldy and adjacent peaks. Most of its range is within the northwest corner of the Gila Wilderness where it is a common and often abundant forest understory species. This type of habitat only occurs in traces on next to the proposed action area. There would be No Impact to this species from the proposed action.
Villous Groundcover Milkvetch	U	Y	Habitat: In sandy soils of volcanic origin on slopes, benches, and ledges in xeric pine forest; 2,100–2,485 m (7,250–8,150 ft). There are no known threats to this species. In addition to its natural habitat, it occurs on road banks that are open but well vegetated (NMRPTC 1999). This plant is not known to occur within or next to the proposed action area. If present, the proposed action may impact individuals but will not contribute to a trend towards federal listing or affect the long term viability of the species.
Gila Thistle	U	Y	Habitat is defined as moist areas or mountain meadows in montane coniferous forest; 2,135-2,440 m (7,000-8,000 ft) (NMRPTC 1999). This type of habitat does exist in traces on the around the proposed action area. The proposed action may impact individuals or habitat but will not contribute to a trend towards federal listing or affect the long term viability of the species.
Wootton's Hawthorn	U	Y	Wootton's hawthorn is found in canyon bottoms and forest understory in montane coniferous forest at elevations of 6,500-8,000 feet. It is known to occur in Grant, Lincoln, and southern Catron Counties. It was not located during floristic surveys conducted in 1994 in the Negrito watershed. This plant is not known to occur within the proposed action area. If present, the

Common Name	Species Present	Habitat Present	Site Specific Discussion & Determination of Proposed Action
			proposed action may impact individuals but will not contribute to a trend towards federal listing or affect the long term viability of the species.
Yellow Lady's Slipper	U	Y	This plant is not known to occur within the proposed action area. If present, the proposed action may impact individuals but will not contribute to a trend towards federal listing or affect the long term viability of the species.
Hess' Fleabane	U	Y	Known populations of this species are within the Gila Wilderness. It is presently known from only two locations in the vicinity of Whitewater Baldy. Each population consists of only a few hundred plants. This type of habitat could occur in next to the proposed action area. The proposed action may impact individuals or habitat but will not contribute to a trend towards federal listing or affect the long term viability of the species.
Mogollon Hawkweed	U	Y	Habitat requirements not known. Possibly similar to (<i>Hieracium fendleri</i>), which is an understory plant in montane coniferous forest. This plant's response to logging and forest fire has not been studied. Additional field surveys are needed to determine its abundance and habitat requirements (NMRPTC 1999). This plant is not known to occur within near or around the proposed action area. There would be No Impact to this species from The proposed action.
Davidson's Cliff Carrot	U	Y	Habitat: Cool, rocky places in piñon-juniper woodland and lower montane coniferous forest; 1,980-2,440 m (6,500-8,000 ft). Conservation Considerations: The distribution, abundance, and habitat requirements for this species are poorly known and need additional study. The rocky, inaccessible habitats of known populations offer some protection from land use impacts. This plant is not known to occur within the proposed action. There would be No Impact to this species from the proposed action.

Management Indicator Species (MIS)

No Action

Selection of the No Action Alternative would not change the current status or trend of any MIS on the GNF.

Proposed Action

A project-specific biological assessment/evaluation was prepared to evaluate the potential impacts to special status species. The following summary of impacts to MIS species is based on findings in the biological assessment/evaluation. All Gila National Forest MIS species were considered and it has been determined that management actions within the South Fork and

Gwynn Tank Campground installation will have the potential to effect the Mexican Spotted Owl, Apache Northern Goshawk and Mule Deer.

Mexican Spotted Owl

This species has already been discussed within the Threatened and Endangered species and will not be discussed further.

Apache Northern Goshawk

Goshawks could be in the area. Direct effects to the goshawk would be noise disturbance from recreation users. Both campgrounds would concentrate users within the proposed campgrounds. This disturbance is expected to be the same as the current camping levels, but in a more concentrated area. Noise from recreational users could deter goshawks from nesting or foraging within the area.

Indirect effects would be to the goshawk native prey base. The goshawk prey base consists of other smaller birds, squirrels and other smaller mammals. The occurrence of human activity, trucks and chainsaws for example, could cause a disturbance in that prey base. The result of the noise from recreational users, could disrupt the continuity of the prey base habitat. This would occur in a small pockets within each of the campgrounds. Each of the disturbances will be short term and will not occur all at once. This gives the prey base and the goshawk the opportunity to forage in other units in a larger area.

The proposed action does not include activities such as timber harvest or fuel wood cutting that would change the seral stage of the ponderosa pine. The implementation of this project under the proposed action **May Impact** individuals, but will not cause a trend toward federal listing or affect the viability of this species.

Mule Deer

The vegetation within the proposed action area is open meadow with scattered ponderosa pine throughout. The common browse species for Mule Deer are Mountain Mahogany, Winter Fat, Gamble Oak, and Grey Oak. Ponderosa Pine and Pinion-Juniper are the dominant overstory species in the low to mid elevations. Douglas Fir and mixed conifer are the dominant overstory species in the higher elevations. This vegetation variation is surrounding both of the proposed campgrounds.

Short term impacts to mule deer may be caused by management activities and human presence. Temporary displacement of individuals may occur during construction and may reoccur during high recreational use of the campgrounds. Displacement would be unavoidable, however, wildlife should reoccupy the project area. The small size of the affected area represents a miniscule amount of the overall mule deer habitat on the forest, therefore, the proposed action will have **No Impact** on the mule deer.

Migratory Birds

No Action

Selection of the No Action Alternative will not impact populations of high priority migratory bird species on National Forest System lands.

Proposed Action

A project-specific biological assessment/evaluation was prepared to evaluate the potential impacts to special status species. The following is a summary of impacts to Migratory Bird species based on findings in the biological assessment/evaluation (table 2). The Gila National Forest lists priority species of concern by vegetation type. The Reserve District Wildlife Biologist reviewed all Partners in Flight species of concern for vegetation types found in this project area (Mixed conifer, Ponderosa pine, pinyon/juniper woodland, montane shrub (oak woodland), and southwestern riparian (low-elevation riparian)).

Table 2. Migratory Bird species that may occur in or near the project area.

Veg type	Species	Habitat Impacts	Disturbance Effects
Mixed Conifer	Williamson's Sapsucker	None anticipated; the installation of the campgrounds is anticipated to cause no change in forest vegetation types.	None anticipated; management activities associated with the proposed action would cause no change in forest vegetation types.
Mixed Conifer	Olive-sided Flycatcher	None anticipated; management activities associated with the proposed action would cause no change in forest vegetation types	None anticipated; management activities associated with the proposed action would cause no change in forest vegetation types
Mixed Conifer	Dusky Flycatcher	None anticipated; the proposed action not anticipated to cause change in forest vegetation types; there is very little habitat for this species near the proposed action.	None anticipated; management activities associated with the proposed action would cause no change in forest vegetation types.
Mixed Conifer and Ponderosa pine	Red-faced Warbler	None anticipated; management activities associated with the proposed action would cause no change in forest vegetation types	None anticipated; management activities associated with the proposed action would cause no change in forest vegetation types
Mixed Conifer and Ponderosa pine	Northern Goshawk	See Sensitive Species Section and MIS section of this report	See Sensitive Species and MIS section of this report
Mixed Conifer and Ponderosa pine	Mexican Spotted Owl	See T&E write-up	See T&E write-up
Ponderosa pine	Flammulated Owl	None anticipated; the proposed action is anticipated to cause no change in forest vegetation types.	None anticipated; the proposed action is anticipated to cause no change in forest vegetation types.
Ponderosa pine	Greater Peewee	None anticipated; the proposed action is anticipated to cause no change in forest vegetation types	None anticipated; the proposed action is anticipated to cause no change in forest vegetation types
Ponderosa pine	Olive Warbler	None anticipated; the proposed action is anticipated	None anticipated; the proposed action is anticipated

Veg type	Species	Habitat Impacts	Disturbance Effects
		to cause no change in forest vegetation types	to cause no change in forest vegetation types
Ponderosa pine	Grace's Warbler	None anticipated; the proposed action is anticipated to cause no change in forest vegetation types	None anticipated; the proposed action is anticipated to cause no change in forest vegetation types
Ponderosa pine / Pinyon-juniper woodland	Virginia's Warbler	None anticipated; the proposed action is anticipated to cause no change in forest vegetation types	None anticipated; the proposed action is anticipated to cause no change in forest vegetation types
Pinyon-juniper woodland	Ferruginous Hawk	None anticipated; the proposed action not anticipated to cause change in forest vegetation types; there is very little habitat for this species near the proposed action	None anticipated; the proposed action not anticipated to cause change in forest vegetation types; there is very little habitat for this species near the proposed action
Pinyon-juniper woodland	Gray Flycatcher	None anticipated; the proposed action not anticipated to cause change in forest vegetation types; there is very little habitat for this species near the proposed action	None anticipated; the proposed action not anticipated to cause change in forest vegetation types; there is very little habitat for this species near the proposed action
Pinyon-juniper woodland	Black-throated Gray Warbler	None anticipated; the proposed action not anticipated to cause change in forest vegetation types; there is very little habitat for this species near the proposed action	None anticipated; the proposed action not anticipated to cause change in forest vegetation types; there is very little habitat for this species near the proposed action
Montane shrub	Green-tailed Towhee	None anticipated; the proposed action is not anticipated to cause change in forest vegetation types	None anticipated; the proposed action is not anticipated to cause change in forest vegetation types
Montane shrub	Black-chinned Sparrow	None anticipated; the proposed action is not anticipated to cause change in forest vegetation types	None anticipated; the proposed action is not anticipated to cause change in forest vegetation types

Watershed/Soils

Both proposed sites are located in the South Fork of Negrito Creek 6th code watershed. Currently this watershed has an Impaired Function rating. Some of the attributes that led to the impaired function of this watershed included poor ratings for the following: road and trail condition, aquatic biota condition, water quality condition and aquatic habitat condition. Reaches of streams that are in some state of non-attainment are documented in "2014-2016 Integrated §303(d)/§305(b) List of Impaired Waters". The South Fork of Negrito Creek has two impairments listed in this report, these are E. coli and water temperature. These factors are considered in the overall watershed rating.

Soils coverage and information was derived from the Forests Terrestrial Ecological Unit Inventory. The first proposed site is located on map unit 571 which is a Pachic Argiustoll, fine.

This soil type is derived from basalt parent material. These soils are fairly stable with a relatively high clay content. The second site is located on map unit 7 which is a Pachic Haplustoll, fine-loamy. This soil is an alluvial soil derived from rhyolite and does not have as high of clay content as the first site and tends to be more erosive than soils derived from basalt.

No Action

There would not be a commitment of soil resources at the two new campgrounds though the areas would continue to experience impacts from dispersed camping. Campground facilities would remain in the riparian zone of South Fork Negrito Creek, and although the campground is closed, campsites and trails will remain along the creek. This will not allow impacted streambanks and vegetation to recover, thus, contributing to the continued decline of riparian conditions in South Fork Negrito Creek.

Proposed Action

There will be a commitment of the soil resource at the new sites though this will be offset by the reclamation of soils at the closed campsites.

Improved riparian conditions and water quality along the South Fork of Negrito Creek are expected with the removal of the campground and its associated facilities in this riparian zone. It would eliminate campsites and trails immediately adjacent to the creek, thus allowing riparian vegetation to improve on currently impacted streambanks and within the floodplain.

The two proposed campground sites would occupy an extremely low proportion or percentage of this watershed thus having very little influence in adding to any negative cumulative affects to the watershed. Implementation of either the No Action or the Proposed Action Alternative would result in little change in overall watershed cumulative impacts to this 6th code watershed. The indicator ratings would all remain the same with the implementation of either Alternative, and the watershed would continue to have an impaired functioning condition rating. However, with the closing of South Fork Negrito Creek campground, riparian conditions would improve over time, thus improving shade over water and aiding in decreasing water temperatures along this currently impacted reach. If South Fork Negrito Creek is able to meet State Water Quality Standards in the future for water temperature, watershed conditions would see improvement as this the Water Quality Indicator is a large contributor to watershed condition ratings.

Cultural Resources

In compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the effects of Action and No Action (action alternatives) were evaluated at the forest level. Gila National Forest Heritage Report #2017-06-035/ NMCRIS 138026 was prepared and submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) with project concurrence received on August 9th 2017.

There is one site in the vicinity, however it is located outside the project area and it is recommended the site be avoided by all project activities. Relocation activities will be monitored sporadically to ensure the site is avoided by project activities. This project will have No Effect on cultural resources if conditions are followed.

Finding of No Significant Impact

As the responsible official, I am responsible for evaluating the effects of the project relative to the definition of significance established by the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR 1508.13). I have reviewed and considered the Preliminary EA and documentation included in the project record, and I have determined that the proposed action and no action alternative will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. As a result, no environmental impact statement will be prepared. My rationale for this finding is as follows, organized by sub-section of the CEQ definition of significance cited above.

Context

The action is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region wide or statewide importance. Effects are limited to the locale of the project area.

Intensity

Intensity is a measure of the severity, extent, or quantity of effects, and is based on information from the effects analysis of this Preliminary EA and the references in the project record. The effects of this project have been appropriately and thoroughly considered with an analysis that is responsive to concerns and issues raised by the public. The agency has taken a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information and knowledge of site-specific conditions gained from field visits. My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project and intensity of effects using the ten factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b).

1. Impact that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

Both beneficial and adverse impacts were considered for the proposed action and no action alternative. The Reserve Ranger District has recently lost two campgrounds due to flooding and safety concerns, however the demand for these recreational opportunities remains. Although short term effects for wildlife can occur, the project will regain these recreation opportunities at a minimal cost, as the infrastructure from the two closed campgrounds will simply be reused for new campgrounds.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Public health and safety will be improved by relocating the camping infrastructure outside of the 100 year floodplain. Campers will have viable camping options and not be exposed to flooding hazards.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as the proximity to historical or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

Forest Archeologist discovered one cultural site outside the project area and mitigation measures will be taken avoid this site. Aside from the cultural site, no other Unique Characteristics of the Geographic Area were identified, therefore this project will not adversely affect parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

No effect to the Quality of the Human Environment were identified.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

No effect to the human environment that are highly uncertain, or involve unknown, or unique risks were identified.

6. The degree to which the action may establish precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The proposed action may establish a precedent for future actions. The Gila National Forest historically developed campgrounds around water features, often times locating campgrounds within the floodplain. As the forest continues to address flood safety concerns within these campgrounds there may be an increased desire to developed camping opportunities outside the floodplain.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.

Cumulative effects will be very minimal and limited primarily to fire activity in the area. The spatial bounds relevant to this project are defined as anything within a half mile buffer around the campgrounds.

Past and present activities in the area include a continuation of dispersed recreation use, livestock grazing, 2012 Whitewater Baldy fire, 2004 Baseball Fire and the 2009 Eckleberger Prescribed fire. The combined effects of these historic fires has impacted Mexican Spotted Owl habitat. What was once a dense canopy cover has been converted to a more open canopy with grassy snag filled pockets.

Present activity includes permitted livestock grazing on the Y Canyon allotment. Permitted grazing will continue with no anticipated impacts to current management.

Reasonably foreseeable activity includes continued permitted livestock grazing as well as potential prescribed fire in the area. Permitted grazing is anticipated to continue similar to current management practices and is not anticipated to change as a result of the proposed activities. Temporary closures of the new campgrounds may be required for specific prescribed fires, but closures will be minimal and will not have an overall impact of the prescription or campground management.

The proposed action, when combined with past, present, and anticipated future actions will not result in any quantifiable cumulative effects.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

Inventory for cultural resources within the areas outlined in the action alternatives was conducted on May 1st and May 3rd of 2017. No cultural resources were encountered within these different alternatives' areas of potential effect. As such, the proposed undertakings pose no adverse effects to cultural resources in the area.

The most recent listing of the National Register of Historic Places has been consulted and no sites which appear on the Register occur in the project area. This proposal complies with the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (1992) and the Region 3 First Amended Programmatic Agreement (USDA 2010).

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was initiated on August 21, 2017. A project-specific biological assessment/evaluation was prepared to evaluate the potential impacts to special status species. All Threatened & Endangered species present in Catron County, NM were considered and it has been determined that management actions within the proposed action will have the potential to effect the Mexican Gray Wolf, Mexican Spotted Owl and its Critical Habitat, and the Narrow-headed Gartersnake and its proposed designated habitat.

The findings of the biological assessment/evaluation determined that this project “**May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect**” the Mexican Spotted Owl, MSO critical habitat and Narrow Headed Gartersnake. A determination of “**May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Modify**” was made for Narrow Headed Gartersnake proposed critical habitat. Findings also determined this project is “**Not Likely to Jeopardize the Continued Existence of the Mexican Gray Wolf**”. A concurrence letter from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was received on April 24, 2018 making this project compliant with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Implementation of the Selected Alternative will not violate any Federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment, including, but not limited to:

- Gila Forest Plan
- Clean Water Act of 1972
- Clean Air Act, as amended in 1977
- Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended
- National Historic Preservation Act of 1966
- Executive Order 13186 of January 2001 (Migratory Bird Treaty Act)